

FOOD SUPPLY SYSTEM OK FOR Y2K

Release No. 0459.99

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 18, 1999 Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, John Koskinen, chairman of President Clinton's Council on Y2K Conversion, and representatives of major food production and distribution industry associations today said they believe the U.S. food supply system is in good shape heading for the Year 2000 transition.

"I want to assure the American people that they will continue to enjoy plentiful and safe food as we start the new millennium," Glickman said. "The federal government has worked hard with all segments of the food supply industry to make sure of that."

USDA has worked with other government agencies and industry officials as part of a national Food Supply Working Group to assess the Y2K readiness of all components of the system to continue producing and moving food safely and efficiently from the farm to grocery shelves. The group has determined the risk of serious or widespread disruptions is slight and that systems tracking food safety inspection are Y2K ready.

Industry experts estimate that wholesalers and retailers carry a 30- to 60-day supply of non-perishable food. Even in the event of disruptions lasting several days, the food supply system could absorb the impact with little ill effect.

Koskinen urged Americans to approach the Y2K transition weekend as if it were any other long holiday weekend and prepare accordingly. This means having a few days' supply of food and water in the pantry.

"As long as traditional shopping patterns continue, food shortages are unlikely," Koskinen said. "But given the vastness of our nation, there may be isolated pockets where minor disruptions occur, similar to a winter snow storm in one section of the country. The good news is that we don't expect any major system-wide disruption."

The President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion has a toll-free information line with information about many areas of interest to consumers at 1-888-USA-4Y2K (1-888-872-4925) and a web site at www.y2k.gov. Additional information about the food supply assessment can be found at www.usda.gov/aphis/FSWG.

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